



NEWS

Supervisor Mark Ridley-Thomas L.A. County Board of Supervisors, 2nd District

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RIDLEY-THOMAS URGES CONGRESSIONAL GOLD MEDALS FOR JAPANESE-AMERICAN INFANTRY UNITS

LOS ANGELES – The Board of Supervisors today approved Supervisor Mark Ridley-Thomas' request to prepare a five-signature letter to Los Angeles Congressional leaders in support of granting a Congressional Gold Medal to the Japanese American 100th Infantry Battalion and 442nd Regimental Combat Team of the U.S. Army in recognition of their heroic and dedicated service during World War II.

On May 14, U.S. Sen. Barbara Boxer introduced SB 1055, legislation honoring the 100th Infantry Battalion, comprised of Japanese Americans from Hawaii, where they were serving with the Hawaii National Guard when Pearl Harbor was bombed.

"After the attack, these soldiers, who were born in Hawaii to immigrants from Japan, were guarded at gunpoint because their loyalty was at question," Supervisor Ridley-Thomas explained. "However, in June of 1942, 1,400 from the Hawaii National Guard were sent to Camp McCoy in Wisconsin, where they trained for nine months, and were then sent on to Camp Selby in Mississippi. "

After several additional months of training, due to the 100th Infantry Battalion's outstanding performance in war maneuvers and exercises, President Roosevelt and the War Department re-opened military service to Japanese American volunteers. These volunteers later became the 442nd Regimental Combat Team.

The motto of the 442nd was "go for broke" which is a gambling term that meant risking everything on one great effort to win big. Most of the families of the 442nd were subject to internment in relocation or internment camps pursuant to President Roosevelt's Executive Order 9066, which declared that all people of Japanese ancestry were excluded from the entire Pacific Coast except for those in internment camps.

These "camps" were surrounded by barbed wired with armed guards located in sentry towers, and were often in desolate, harsh environments where extreme temperatures, no running water, poor sanitary conditions, and substandard, barrack-like housing were the norm.

The 442nd trained for almost a year and on May 1, 1944, they were sent to battle in the European theater, where they served valiantly in France, Italy, and Germany.

The 442nd famously rescued the "Lost Battalion" at Biffontaine, France, and suffered casualties of over half of its roster, 800 men, while rescuing 211 members of the "Lost Battalion." The 522nd Field Artillery Battalion of the 442nd was among the first Allied troops to release prisoners from the Dachau concentration camp. The men of the 442nd were awarded 9,486 Purple Hearts, 21 Medals of Honor, and an unprecedented eight Presidential Unit Citations.

"These brave and loyal men had to combat two wars: the war against the enemies of the United States and its allies, and the war of prejudice at home," Ridley-Thomas said. "Because of their sacrifices, loyalty, bravery, and patriotism, the Board of Supervisors must express its strong support of Senator Boxer's legislation which would award the Congressional Gold Medal to the 100th Infantry Battalion and the 442nd Regimental Combat Team."

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